



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
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BUDGET DEPARTMENT

To: City Council
From: Jeana Franconi, Budget Director
Date: October 22, 2014
Re: Participatory Budgeting in Cambridge

Participatory Budgeting Overview

Participatory budgeting (PB) seeks to empower residents through hands-on civic engagement and direct influence over how taxpayer money is spent. It is a democratic process in which community members directly decide how to spend part of a public budget.

The City Manager is recommending an allocation of \$500,000 in capital funds for the 2015-2016 pilot PB process. The goals of Cambridge's PB initiative are to directly involve residents in the budgeting and city-building process, foster civic engagement and community spirit, and help ensure that the City's capital plan reflects the priorities of Cambridge residents.

PB Timeline

Key phases of the pilot PB process will include:

- Creation of a Steering Committee consisting of non-profit and community-based organizations as well as residents at large to guide the overall PB process. (November)
- Residents brainstorm and submit ideas for capital projects (December-February)
- Volunteer "budget delegates" turn ideas into concrete project proposals (January-February)
- City staff vet proposals for feasibility and cost (February-March)
- City Manager approves proposals (March)
- Residents vote on which projects they would like the City to fund (March)
- Results are announced and winning projects are approved for the City's FY16 Capital Budget (April) and submitted to the Council for adoption
- We conduct an evaluation of the pilot PB process (April-June)
- Winning projects are implemented (July onward)

The City is planning to hold an **information session on Tuesday, October 28** from 6:00-7:30pm at the Citywide Senior Center for community members who are interested in serving on the Steering Committee (SC) or learning how to otherwise get involved with PB in Cambridge.

Steering Committee

The SC will be the main body organizing and guiding residents through the PB process. Staffing the SC with non-profit organizations and community members lends the City's PB process credibility and allows the City to magnify its outreach to residents by working through the existing networks and constituencies served by SC members.

The SC will approve the City's participatory budgeting "rulebook" (overall guidelines and timeline), conduct outreach to get as many Cambridge residents involved as possible, recruit volunteers to turn ideas into concrete project proposals, and help organize the voting process. Anyone who is interested in serving on the SC will need to submit an application to the City.

PB Partner

The City has contracted with the [Participatory Budgeting Project](#) (PBP) to help us organize our PB process. PBP is a non-profit organization based in New York that specializes in facilitating grassroots participatory budgeting processes in the United States and Canada. PBP has worked with Boston, Chicago, New York, San Francisco, and Vallejo, CA. In those places, PB allocations range from \$300,000 to \$14 million per year.

PBP's role is to provide general guidance and technical support to the City as we go through the pilot PB process. PBP will send staff from New York to help us facilitate certain meetings with the public and will share customizable materials and lessons learned from the other communities they have worked with. PBP will also help us with resident outreach and engagement, voting facilitation, and evaluation of the PB process next spring. Most of this assistance will come in the form of weekly conference calls between PBP staff and Cambridge Budget staff. The City is paying PBP \$50,000 for their services.

City Resources

Carrying out a successful PB process will require a significant investment of City staff resources from the Budget Office, as well as contributions from City leadership, the Finance Director, and those City departments that will need to vet projects for feasibility and cost.

PB represents a unique opportunity to build community and directly engage citizens in government. A successful PB process will send a strong signal that Cambridge is dedicated to open, responsive government and that it trusts citizens to decide what is best for their neighborhoods.